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NGOs and Environmental Protection: A Case Study of 'Drongo' Organization in Satara City, Maharashtra



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Introduction:

The problem of environmental degradation is a global problem. It is mainly caused due to human interventions in nature and factors such as industrialization, urbanization and other developmental projects. All the countries in the world should give serious attention towards this problem. The judicious use and preservation of natural resources for the present and future generations is now considered as our prime duty. The environmental protection requires collaboration of all concerned; this goal cannot be achieved only by GOs by making laws. It requires awareness among masses and peoples' active participation. Toward this end, the role of NGOs becomes more crucial. There is paucity of empirical sociological studies on less visible local environmental movement organizations focusing on local issues in various parts of the country. Especially, empirical studies of NGOs/Groups working in the field of environmental protection are distinctly lacking in the available literature. The objective of the present paper is to discuss the role of 'Drongo' officially registered as Drongo Environmental Movement an NGO working in the field of environmental protection in Satara City, Maharashtra.

Ecologically, the Satara district occupies prominent place in Maharashtra. The western part of Satara district is mainly surrounded by the Sahyadri ranges, and eastern part is drought prone region. In western part of the district, there are popular tourist centers like Mahabaleshwar, Kas plateau (valley of flowers) Thaseghar, Koyana sanctuary etc. These places come under the eco-sensitive zone. There are more than 60 NGOs in Satara district. 'Drongo' is one of the prominent organizations working in the field of environment

Key Words: NGOs, Environmental Protection, Drongo Organization

About Drongo:

The organization Drongo, started its work in the field of environment from 1997 but it was formally registered on 18th Feb-2003. The NGO is named after the bird Drongo. It works as watch-dog, gives danger signals when there is possible danger. Likewise, the members of NGO Drongo also give danger signal and

creates awareness about environmental or ecological degradation in and around Satara. The preservation and protection of ecology in the region is the motto of Drongo. The NGO organizes activities where local participation is required. This helps in creating awareness amongst the locals in the area. This is achieved through programmes as exhibitions, competitions and publishing materials in local news papers.

Methodology:

The paper is mainly based on the data collected from the key activists of Drongo by conducting interviews with schedule and fieldwork observations.

Role of Drongo in Environmental Protection:

In order to bring out the role of Drongo in environmental protection, important activities undertaken by the Drongo have been briefly discussed below:

1. Awareness Generation Programmes:

To create awareness among masses Drongo organizes different programmes such as seminars, meetings, rallies etc. One seminar on environmental protection with the help of NISARG MITRA organization and their members was organized on 12th Jan 2004.

2. Opposition to new Mahabaleshwar Development Project:

Mahabaleshwar is one of the popular hill stations in Maharashtra. Not only Indians but also foreigners visit this place. There is a lot of bio-diversity. But recently the Government of Maharashtra approved the new Mahabaleshwar project, due to this project the biodiversity is likely to come in danger. Therefore, the Drongo strongly opposed at the time of public hearing. For this purpose they organized seminar, lectures and workshops. The drongo got support of other NGOs in Satara district by pointing out drawbacks of this project, and they have appealed to Govt. Because of this activity collaboration with other NGOs was effected and awareness was created. One article on this subject was also published by the president of Drongo Mr. Bhoite in the daily 'Loksatta'.

3. Awareness to prevent forest fire :

There are many ecologically ill effects of forest fire. Drongo has undertaken various programmes for

creation of awareness among the people of Satara city for protection of forest fire. They have conducted lectures, seminars, slide shows and exhibited posters and screened documentary. They have also hired a rickshaw with a cassette on harmful consequences of fire being played in all the villages which are near hilly and fire prone regions. If there is any forest fire, the members of Drongo are always ready to control it.

4. Celebration of Gulmohar Day:

Every year, on the 1st May the Gulmohar Day is celebrated jointly by Gulmohar Group and Drongo to create awareness among the students. The writers, poets and painters are called for this programme. Pictures drawn in the various competitions are kept in the Maratha Art Gallery for exhibition. Cultural programmes are also arranged in the evening on this day. Drawing competition is organized for creating awareness about nature among the children. In this competition the subjects like the decay of nature, pollution are deliberately given in order to realize the present condition of nature. Expert guest lectures on the subjects like environment protection, child nourishment are organized for the children. Thus, these competitions create awareness among the children about environment.

5. Rejuvenation of the Banyan Tree:

The banyan tree has historical significance in India. The banyan tree at Mhasve, Tal-Wai is of 250 year old and its branches have spread in one hectare area. Once upon a time the tree was declared as the largest banyan tree in Asia and this has been documented in "The Flora of British India" published by Theodor Cook. It has been regarded as an invaluable asset of Satara district. Today It is the second largest tree of Asia. To protect this historical heritage Drongo has made successful efforts. The members of Drongo nourish this tree and create awareness among people through different activities.

6. Opposition to Bauxite Excavation:

On 10th April 2008, the Bauxite Excavation Project was started at Kushi in Tal- Patan, Dist-Satara. It might harm the surrounding farming activities, hills environment and the life of people living in this area. When it came to know to Drongo, the Drongo along with the people of that area went and resisted that project and halted the project. Drongo also made awareness about the environment among the people and the nature was protected.

7. Ganapati Dan Campaign:

Ganesha festival is one of the very popular festivals in Maharashtra. More than lakh idol of Ganesha are immersed in water. It causes water pollution. These idols are made up from plaster of paris and chemical colors. To prevent this, Drongo

and Maharashtra Andhashradha Nirmulan Samiti jointly organized 'Ganapati Dan' (Donating the idols instead of immersing in water) and 'Nirmalya Dan' programmes. 'Ek Gaon Ek Ganapati' concept is implemented in so many villages.

8. Organization of Kas Nature Camp:

On 15th and 16th Sept 2004, Art Institute, Kolhapur and Arts and Commerce College, Satara students participated in Kas Nature Camp. The students observed various plants on Kas plateau and sought guidance about them from experts of Drongo.

9. Preservation of seeds and seed/tree plantation :

Every year Drongo collects seeds and plants them and distribute it various schools and colleges. Free plants for plantation are also given by the Drongo. Every year from July to August Drongo gives free plants to various institutions and individuals and it is assured from them that they will protect the trees. The trees distributed are local varieties and many of them are rare and endangered. This activity receives a spontaneous response every year.

10. Beautification of Ajinkya Tara (fort):

Every year Drongo tries to beautify and enhance the beauty of Ajinkya Tara. It is an historical place situated in Satara. Its heritage is sustained through these activities.

11. Preparation of Documentary on Eco Sensitive Zone, Mahabaleshwar :

Drongo has prepared a documentary on Eco-sensitive zone, Mahabaleshwar.

12. Wildlife Week:

Every year between 1st Oct. to 7th Oct World Wildlife Week is celebrated. During the celebration, collection and exhibition of nature photographs and nature painting is also organized. For this competition, awards, prizes are distributed. The photographs and paintings are kept in Maratha Art Gallery for the exhibition.

13. Moonlight Trecking:

It was organized on a full moon night for a distance between Satara and Kas (26 Kms) from 8 p.m. to 4.45 a.m. In it people came across to many animals like barking deer, rabbit, snakes, mouse deer etc. and got information about them.

14. Protection of Injured Wildlife:

Many injured wild animals and birds are provided medical treatment and left to the safe places and forests by the Drongo activists. In Nov 2010 Drongo gave its recommendations about world heritage spot to the World Heritage Committee of Switzerland and Austria.

15. Research Project Completed:

Drongo submitted the project on Fish to the Dept. of Environmental Science of Shivaji University

Kolhapur. It also limits the area in which fishes can breed safely.

16. Drongo's Stand on Locally Relevant ecological issues: In view of the activists of Drongo:

1. The valley of flowers of Maharashtra Kas plateau, Thoseghar, Chalkewadi, Mahabaleshwar, Panchgani and Koyna forest which are beautified with biodiversity should be kept as it is.
2. Kas plateau should be included as one of the Global Mega Biodiversity Centre out of 25 centres.
3. New Mahabaleshwar project should be modified.
4. Mahabaleshwar, Kas plateau and Koyna forest should be included into ecologically sensitive zone areas.
5. The efforts should be made to make provision of food, medical facilities to wild animals, and their protection and migration corridor.
6. The Western Ghats should be recognized as hyper-sensitive zone in the Central Government's draft.
7. Permission should be given to the new Western Tiger Project. Moreover it should be included into World Natural Heritage.
8. There is great potential for Agri-tourism, Eco-tourism, Adventure tourism because these regions have great historical heritage.

Concluding Remarks:

The case study of "Drongo" revealed that NGOs can play effective role in creating environmental awareness, they can elicit people's participation in protection of environment by undertaking direct interventionist activities and can effectively oppose ecologically destructive developmental project by mobilizing protest movements. The Drongo organization is working to nourish nature and protect environment in Satara district and surrounding areas. This organization specially works in the western ghat of Satara district. Many programmes have been effectively through this organization such as opposition to fire, opposition to jungle cutting, opposition to new Mahabaleshwar project, people awareness, observation of Koyna forest, census of tigers, Kas nature camp, opposition to Boxite excavation, documentary production etc. The collaboration with other organizations has resulted into launching a new social movement in Satara district to protect environment. The efforts are made to include Kas and Koyna forest into World Natural Heritage. The work of Drongo is proving to be trend setter as many similar organizations have come up with similar type of work in the field of nature conservation.

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